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Sinn Fein's mask slips further



Mitchell McLaughlin

Sinn Fein had its true face revealed after its chairman Mitchell McLaughlin said on Dublin television that the murder of West Belfast mother Jean McConville over 30 years ago was “not a criminal act”.

Dublin opposition parties last night hit out at McLaughlin's comments, with Labour leader Pat Rabbitte saying: “Any civilised society must consider the abduction and murder of a mother of 10 children to be a crime of considerable barbarism.” Fine Gael leader in the Senate, Brian Hayes said what the IRA had done in killing 1,500 people over 35 years was “a crime in every circumstance”.

McLaughlin's remarks were condemned immediately by Dublin's Justice Minister, Michael McDowell, as being indicative of the Republican view that they were the government in this country.

In heated exchanges with the Justice Minister on RTE's Questions and Answers on Monday night, Mr McLaughlin said he believed the murder of Mrs McConville in 1972 was “wrong” but he did not regard it as a crime. Mr McDowell said the reason why the Sinn Fein chairman felt this way was “because they all believe the IRA is the legitimate government of this country”.

Mr McLaughlin's comments were widely viewed as a major gaffe and he issued a statement as the controversy grew, again repeating that he regarded Mrs McConville's killing as being wrong. He made no reference in this to his remark that the murder was not a crime. McLaughlin also said on the programme that anybody who believed the IRA was going to issue a statement saying it would no longer be involved in criminality was “living in cloud cuckoo land”.